

398#10.5

The Stories Behind the Stories



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Introduction

Originally 398#10 was going to be published with "the stories behind the stories" and other stuff, such as *The Woods*, the *WorldForge*, and the interview by Adam Christian Robertson. But... I decided against it. Partly because I wanted to leave the stories a mystery and partly because I wanted to cut content to make the zine smaller and more affordable. However, people do ask where my stories come from, so for those people I am publishing this zine.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth J. M. W.
December 2008

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Cover illustration by David Donelson.

The Boy Who Owned the Forest
398#3

This story is basically about Focus. Something I'm not very good at. I always think if I just focus on my writing, I'll be able to accomplish more, but there are always so many other things I'm thinking about or involved in, such as dancing or thinking about going back to school and looking for a better job and things like that. It would be wonderful if I could focus on one thing and do it and do it good.

The Maze
398#3

The theme of this story is finding where you fit into the world. And sometimes it's not a place that makes you feel at home, but a person.

Reading this over now, I wonder where all this weirdness comes from. Many parts are rooted in my real life experiences. The cornstalks by the paved path by the train tracks exist: I rode by them on my bike once and knew I wanted to write a story about it, about going into the cornstalks. And I wrote this shortly after I came back from a trip to England, where I went to castles, and one particular castle had a little hedge maze behind it. Before we toured the castle, we ate some scones. While a lot of things in all of my stories come from real life experiences and real places, there are also all the other parts that leave me wondering, such as tears turning to eggshells, turning into a puzzle, that creates a magic egg that a bird flies out of (the same type of bird I saw while on a cruise when I was 17, they were elegant and had forked tails, but they were black instead of white). It's all of those weird, unnatural things that simultaneously amaze and confuse me when I go back and read stories I wrote years ago.

Summer
398#4

This was originally written for my high school writer's craft class. The assignment was to write about a person who embodied a season.

Chapter Eleven

398#4

This story is titled Chapter Eleven because it was from a book/novella I was working on that was going to tell a story backwards and start at Chapter Eleven. I never finished it. The story was about being able to escape. Originally the woman with wings statue was a totem pole, and I did a lot of research on totem poles and Thunder Birds, which commonly top totem poles. But in the end I didn't want the story to be about Native American folklore and decided to just make it a random statue of a woman with wings. The totem pole at the beach looking out over the water is an actual place where I often ride my bike to in the summer. It appears again in the story Mermaid.

The Winter of the River

398#5

I didn't realize this until I just reread this story now, but this is one of the only 398 stories that is a love story. Basically it's about when you really like someone, but you know it's not meant to be and you have to let go, even if your heart may not be ready.

There is a back story here but I don't actually spell it out to the reader. Mary comes from an abusive home, and that is why she is bruised and why she feels so much safer under the ice, away from her real "home". and even though she loves Will she knows her life will be safer with Jack, her rescuer, who she also loves since he has introduced her to a new place where no one hurts her.

The Piano that Scream

398#8

Many people read this story and then tell me they don't get it. But really, there isn't anything to get. It's just a story. Usually my stories come from some sort of theme, such as I want to write about focusing on just one thing, or I want to write about letting go even though you don't want to, or I want to write about how when you're little certain things can seem so magical and when you go back years later they no longer hold the same power over you. But this story just sort of came out of nowhere and it doesn't really have any sort of theme. It makes me feel creepy and chilly and haunted whenever I read it. But if you spend a night in my bedroom at my parents' house you'll hear the train whistle, and if you go out in the hall you'll see the piano with the moustache, and if walk down the block a bit, you'll come to the river. When one of my brothers read the story, he knew it was exactly our house and neighbourhood that it took place in.

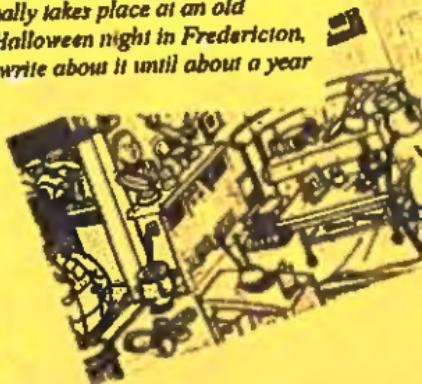
There is a deeper story though, that I don't really illustrate but I know it's there, like in *The Winter of the River*. Basically, in this story the mother died because she committed suicide. The piano mourns the loss of the mother and during the part where the girl is pleading with it, saying, "Piano, don't do this! Don't leave like mother!" It is because the piano is trying to drown itself. I don't really feel the reader needs to know all these details and I also don't mind if people interpret the stories differently than how I see them, so I don't try to spell out all these details to the reader.

The Abandoned School

398#7

This story is about when you're younger you have such big imaginary worlds, and when you return to them when you're older everything seems smaller and less magical — and an old school is no longer a castle, but just an old school. The setting for this story actually takes place at an old abandoned grade school I came across on Halloween night in Fredericton, New Brunswick when I was 20 and I didn't write about it until about a year later when I was living in Toronto.

four



Mermaid
39827

This one isn't really a "story", because it's all true and it all happened. I hate going to clubs. I don't drink. It's boring and usually I just end up feeling upset and like I don't belong in the world. Usually I just go home and go to bed. But this particular time I went to the beach and I felt at peace, like I did belong, just in a different place than where most people feel comfortable. I love water and feel very safe and peaceful when near it or in it. I also love the night.

Cornelia & Timothy
39828

I just wanted to write a pretty little story about zines. I am constantly amazed by the kind of things that end up in my mail box and all I've learned about the world through reading zines. Also, it feels like zines are in their own secret world and they only really appear to those who need them most. Other people, the people who I try explain zines to and they ask about how much money I make and ask why don't you just put your stories on a web site?, etc. Those people are the ones who just don't get it and are denied access into the wonderful world of zines. (and I do believe I meant this to be a younger version of the Cornelia in Chapter Eleven)

The Tree
39829

I always wonder what it'd be like to be a tree and have to be rooted to the same spot your whole life. There must be some trees out there who want to get up and see the world.

...TURN IT
UP REAL
HIGH!

The Paper Boy
398#10

For some reason the idea of being made of paper and mailing yourself around came into my mind and then this is the story that came out of it. I feel it's a little bit different then most of my other stories. It's supposed to be silly, but I realize it comes off as a bit serious. The ending and relationship theme may be a bit more on the serious side, but the whole paper part was supposed to be a bit more... funny and/or quirky. And if just paper part was 398 story if the boyfriend was regular flesh and blood, now would it?

Six



The Woods the World Forgot

This is from a one-shot zine of the same name made in May 2003. It's not part of 398, but it's a non-fiction piece about the river near my house, which is a popular character in my 398 stories, so I thought I would include it.

Last summer my dad told me about the bridge behind the new houses - the Victorian style homes built in the field we used to shoot rockets with him and my brothers. I had two rockets: a pastel pink and purple one my oldest brother made for me, and one called The Gnome that I made from a kit - it was red, white and green.

My pink and purple rocket once landed in the river at the back of the field and a big scary dog retrieved it and chewed it up. It was a very scary dog.

A childhood friend and I used to go to the river and pick reeds that were tall enough to tickle the street lights on the walk home through suburbia. But once when we were playing down by the river we were chased by a group of boys with snakes and another time we were chased by boys with bows and arrows. After Halloween my dad used to take my brothers and me to shoot arrows at the rotting Jack O' Lanterns.

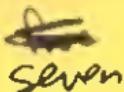
I went to see the bridge my dad told me about. Behind the bridge was a gravel trail that was pleasant to walk on. While my friend and I were studying for our final high school exams we took a break to visit the bridge.

Later I got a camera and would often take it there and take pictures of the flowers and plants and trees and river and bridge. Some times I used it as an escape, like when it just got too crowded and crazy at my house at Thanksgiving I went out and took pictures by the river.

In April I took up jogging. Actually, I do more walking than jogging, but I get to visit the woods and the river every morning. Usually I cross at the stepping stones, not the bridge, but it has rained a lot lately, so much so that you couldn't even see the stones I used to cross over.

Today I've come to the river to take pictures and explore and to write. I'm sitting on the bank of the river writing this, but I think I'd like to type it up since my writing is kind of messy, and also add some pictures to it.

I've seen some amazing things today. I just saw a bright red lady bug hover down to a leaf. And just before that a blue jay came zooming down, yelling about something and then flew along the surface of the river. Just as it rounded the bend and was out of sight, another blue jay followed and did the exact same thing, except this one was silent.


Seven

I was thinking about canoeing down the river, probably with my dad. He did it before with my brothers. But today I noticed some parts are really shallow, you'd have to go after it rains a lot.

In the winter it totally freezes over and I skated along it in my boots. It's really neat because the river bank is about six or seven feet of slope from the proper trail so you're in a valley surrounded by trees laden with snow. I drew pictures in the fluffy snow that had fallen on the ice.

Today I saw a few rabbits, brown with white cotton tails, just like Peter Rabbit. I also walked into sticky spider web. Right now I can feel the mud of the river bank soaking into my jeans, but it's okay because they're not a good pair. My feet are desleepifying - I had been sitting cross legged.

I feel like I should go home, even though I don't have to go to work for another two hours. And I feel like I'm not doing my sanctuary justice in this mini zine, I can't find the words to describe it properly. Most people wouldn't understand if they came to see for themselves, what with the expressway running overhead near the stepping stones and the airplanes coming in to land at the nearby airport and the fitness centre right next door and to the other side there's a row of Victorian houses and soon there'll be apartment buildings in what's left of the rocket field. Yesterday, while on my jog, I was thinking it's a strange little patch of nature surrounded by the outside world: the woods the world forgot.

A robin just flew over head and has now landed on a nearby branch and is singing a pretty song. This is the closest thing I have to real nature in a world that's going concrete so I don't care if others think it's silly to love this dirty little river so much.

end

— eight

Interview by Adam Christian Robertson, July 2005

I was contacted by Adam Christian Robertson because he was working on a project for school about zines and he wanted to interview a few zinesters. I said sure, and here is the interview. I thought it might be interesting to include it in here.

1. When did you first start writing zines?

I first started writing zines in summer 2002.

2. What was your inspiration to publish the first 398?

I've always wanted to be a writer, and making my own zine gave me a chance to publish my writing. I also really enjoy planning how the zine is going to look. I really like fairy tales, especially those of Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde. Often stories like this don't get taken too seriously and are thought of as kid's stories, so there isn't really anywhere else I could publish my own fairy tale-like stories but in my zine.

3. What are some of your favorite zines(if any)?

One of my favourite perzines/travel zines is Escaping Suburbia, by Jen Pilles. I also like Vanessa Berry's litzines and I recently read a litzine called Giantess by Candace Marguret that I really liked. Smelling Trees is another interesting litzine, by Sinoun. There are probably others I'm forgetting to mention.

4. You have a great writing style. Have you thought about expanding to other writing formats? Do you feel you will be publishing zines throughout your life?

Like I said before, I've always wanted to be an author. I'd like to eventually become a published author of young adult fantasy books and general young adult fiction too. I've written shows for the dance theatre group I'm with but we haven't finished any of them yet. I'm not sure if I'll be publishing zines throughout my life, but I'm sure I'll continue to read them.

~~scribble~~ nine

5. I saw that you had put out a couple of other zines such as "What's a Zine?" and "The Woods the World Forgot". Are there any other zine projects you have on the burner?

I'm currently working on a compilation zine of excerpts from published perzines that's supposed to be done in August 2005. I'm not sure if that's going to be a one time thing or if there is going to be more issues after it. I'm trying to write the next issue of 398 but lately I've been working on book stuff and theatre stuff and not so much zine stuff. I also have ideas for a few other zines, mostly themed perzines.

6. Do you have any advice for someone who is trying to write a zine for the first time?

Just to write about something you like and would like to read a zine about. Sometimes it takes a few tries to figure that out. When I'm making my zine I think about whether I'd be happy to receive my own zine in the mail.

7. I'm trying to think of how to word this question here...How big of a deal is 398 in your life? Is it a sort of hobby you tinker with, or does it take up more of your free time than the average hobby would (whatever that would be, stamp collecting no doubt)?

Most of the time I don't plan to write a story. I just kind of wait around until one comes. After that I spend time fixing it up. When I feel I have enough for an issue of 398 I plan how I want it to look and all that: printing, putting it together, sending it to distros, etc. But I only make about two issues a year so I guess it's not very time consuming. As for how big of a deal it is in my life... Well, 398 often motivates me to write. Before zines there wasn't much of a point to write my little stories because no one ever saw them, and I didn't think I was very good either. It's encouraging to keep writing when I hear from people like you who say they enjoy what I do, since most of the time I think I'm no good. Also, because of zines I do a lot more non-fiction writing that I never would have done. Most of it isn't published, but I still enjoy it and maybe someday it will be. Generally, zines have had a very big positive impact on my life, and not just in the writing scheme of things, but also emotionally since I was going through a particularly dark time in my life just before I discovered zines.

~~Answer~~
for

8. How would one go about getting the first few issues of 398?

Well . I don't like the very first one so I don't make anymore of those. But the covers were neat, they were made out of x-ray film. I also don't like some of the others, but I was planning on making more of =3 and =5 (and maybe =2) once I have enough extra money to print them, but first I have to print the compilation perzine. I have a list of distros on my website who carry 398, and it's listed which issues they have (some have old ones). Some of the ones I don't like I do like parts of, so sometime in the future I plan on doing an issue of 398 with all my favourite parts of previous issues, and maybe with little explanations of where the stories came from too.

Update: all my available zines can be found at my shop
petitspoissons.etsy.com



398

of x-ray
film cover

#1 Jan 2003

bound
with red thread

#2 Feb. 2003

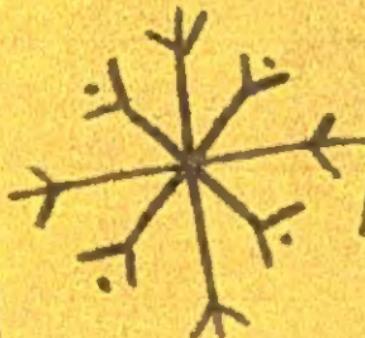
#3 May 2003

the
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→ this one
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#5 Jun. 2004

398 five



398.4



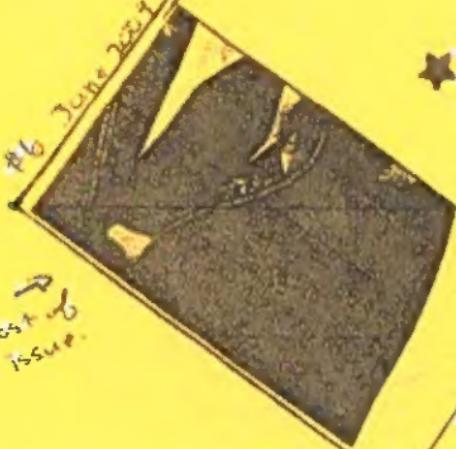
159 July 2003

July 2003

398
Issue number six
June 2005



#6 June 2005



Printed
the most
this issue.

thirteen



4 cut out
red kite
w/ n
clouds
cover



page to a
book on
each cover



Illustrated by
David Danielson

~~fourteen~~

Hey! How's it
going. Hope everything
is good. Here is
my latest 398 zine
plus my new photo
zine I've been
working on, which kind of
feels like 398, but not
through pictures instead.
Hope you enjoy

Sincerely,
J.M.W.

Elizabeth J.M.W.

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January
2009

